

University Environment Committee Annual Report 2024-2025

For the Senate Coordinating Council Meeting, May 13, 2025

By **Mona Ramonetti** and **Christopher Sellers** , Co-Chairs

Committee Charge: This committee shall examine all aspects of the physical campus environment, including but not limited to conservation of natural areas, ecological preserves and historic sites and artifacts; transportation, parking, human health issues, facilities planning, alternative energy, energy efficiency, recycling, waste management, and general appearance of all campus locations. It will consult with and advise the cognate administrator, the Assistant Vice President for Facilities and Services.

Committee Composition:

Humanities and Fine Arts: Joanna Kaczorowska, Peg Spitzer

Social and Behavioral Sciences: Christopher Percival, Christopher Sellers

Natural Sciences: John True, Giacinto Piacquadio

Library: Mona Ramonetti

College of Engineering: Xinwei Mao, Carlos Colosqui

Health Sciences Center: Sian Piret, Michelino Puopolo

Professionals: Tiffany Friedman, Angela Gupta

Graduate Students: Tyler Levy.

Undergraduate Students: Peter Joyce, Timothy Gonzalez

Ex officio members: Gary Kaczmarczyk

Executive Committee Liaison: Fred Walter

Summary of Activities:

Storm Damage and Infrastructure: A significant topic of discussion early in the academic was the damage caused by the August 18-19, 2024 storm. The committee convened a discussion with administrative guests that provided a clearer picture of the resulting damage: 65 buildings recorded damage, included two flooded dams that were the same that had flooded in a storm several years earlier. Our discussion then addressed the insufficiency of earlier fixes and problems of, infrastructure capacity, as well as the need for future planning to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events given their growing probability through climate change. There were discussions around reimbursement for emergency costs, repair work and potential upgrades to infrastructure to handle more frequent and severe weather. Guests: Christopher Martin, Associate Vice President of Campus Planning, Design, and Construction (CPDC) and Eric Tiedemann. Interim Director of Construction for CPDC).

Transportation and Bike Paths: Improving bicycle and pedestrian safety on campus was a recurring theme. A Working Group of the committee led by Chris Percival and Fred Walter undertook a study of these issues and prepared a detailed report issued November 11, 2024.. They made many recommendations to improve safety and access, especially concerning the connection between campus bike paths and neighborhoods to the east. The committee also undertook more general discussions about traffic and transportation needs on campus. Among the highlights of this discussion, a visiting team of faculty reported on a poll they have been undertaking about a potential employee shuttle and other broader efforts to decrease automobile use and promote alternative transportation. Guests: Anil Yazici, Elizabeth Hewitt, Reuben Kline attended offering more insight to the committee.

Ashley Schiff Preserve: the more permanent preservation of this on-campus forest remained a major concern of the committee throughout the year. We were gratified that the Stony Brook Council passed resolutions to establish permanent protection for the Ashley Schiff Preserve (ASP). Yet the acreage protected (~19 acres on May 6, 2024, and up to ~25.6 on July 25, 2024) was less than that slated in previous surveys (28.275 acres in 1970 and 26.677 acres in 1998), though in alignment with President McInnis' pledge and Senior Vice President Greiman's statements. While Interim SBU President McCormick has considered these resolutions binding, that determination could potentially be reversed. And in October 2024, when the SUNY Board of Trustees approved naming the 25.6088-acre area the "Ashley Schiff Nature Preserve," it only implied protection without explicitly stating it, which led President McCormick to note the difficulty of protecting land.

To forgo the need for state-level protective legislation, the University Environment Committee recommends that 2025 Master Plan and subsequent plans should explicitly state formal and permanent protection for the Preserve. The administration should also consider advocating to add the Preserve to the State Nature and Historical Preserve Trust (outlined in Article 45 of NYS Law).

Composting, Recycling, and Waste Disposal:

Composting: A successful pilot composting program was conducted in Chavez Hall last fall with student intern volunteers with a focus on pre-consumer waste and supported by Tony Gentile, Manager of Machine Operated Services for the Faculty Student Association.. This year, a group of five students sought to expand the program to additional dormitories. An SBU 102 Course over the spring semester, taught by undergrad and UEC participant Sara Poon is engaging students in recycling and other hands-on environmental work, and it will be taught by Poon. The course provides a good model for curricular opportunities to introduce environmental work as a subject for learning and research.

Recycling: Reusable and single-use items for Stony Brook University dining halls also came under discussion. We learned that -SBU Eats utilizes reusable containers for students on meal plans, with a \$5 charge for unreturned containers; that elsewhere, a mixture of reusable and single-use plastic items are used; that some dining areas offer metal utensils and are considering biodegradable utensils; yet also that many recyclable items may not undergo

recycling. As SUNY has official plans to eliminate all single-use items in dining halls by August 2027, the committee hopes to receive a report at our final meeting this year about what dining hall plans may be for moving closer to this goal.

Moving toward Cleaner Energy: Following up on our report the previous year on SBU Clean Energy Master Plan, the UEC has held several discussions about progress being made on many of these fronts. It is worth noting that still, several years after a new contract for operating the Calpine plant enabled SBU to finally begin solar and other green energy production on-campus, we still don't have any solar panels in operation. However, SBU's Office of Sustainability has had some additional hiring and large solar array projects are moving forward along with the expansion of an electric vehicle (EV) fleet master plan. SBU has also worked with NYS to gain new funding through a bond act that will enable much more clean energy facilities and enabling infrastructure, including the installation of conduits for future EV charging stations. However, it is also clear that the 2030 target set by the governor for conversion to clean electricity will not be met.

Guests: Tom Lanzilotta, Assistant Director of Energy & Sustainability and Erin Kluge, Sustainability Coordinator; Vice President for Facilities and Services Bill Hermann. UEC members also took part in a visit from the SUNY sustainability and energy officer, Carter Strickland.

Limiting campus growth and protecting our on-campus forests: The committee also responded to university plans to expand dorms and other buildings by stepping up its attention to the actual and potential environmental consequences of this projected growth. Receiving warnings and complaints from faculty and students, we looked into how to monitor where and when tree cutting and other clearance of pollinating plants was underway, and how the administration might improve its transparency as well as participation of the SBU community regarding such plans. UEC had a table at Earthstock with a petition to sign urging the SBU Administration in its campus planning to prioritize sustainability by preserving all existing forested areas on campus.

We did learn from Bill Herman that there is a 3:1 tree-planting commitment in the master plan that is currently under development. A portfolio of buildable sites will be shared with the committee in 6 months. Discussions on tree cutting should start with Chris Martin. Multistory buildings and building on existing footprints are being considered. Herman also will visit our May 14, 2025, to discuss how our committee can serve as a public and participatory vehicle for the master planning process that is currently underway.

Guests: Vice President for Facilities & Services Bill Herrmann

Other Sustainability Efforts: Though participation of Jennifer Gilday, the committee has remained in steady and collaborative touch with the Collaborative for the Earth (C4E). Among our contributions, we provided an early sounding board for preparation of a report for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) to raise the university's sustainability rating, with a goal of achieving a Gold ranking. This report is scheduled for publication in 2025.